



Hill cutting continues unabated at Hawliaderpara in Pathantula. Known as Majunder Tila in Sylhet, it used to be a safe haven for various animals and birds until a few years ago. But having lost their habitat due to the hill cutting, monkeys now invade surrounding homes for food. Majunder Babu, who used to own this hill, sold it to different people about three years ago, and the new owners are destroying the hill for setting up various structures. District's environment director said he was not aware of the destruction, but would take action in this regard.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

ILO returns duty-free car to customs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country office of International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Dhaka yesterday handed over a car, brought in Bangladesh under a duty-free facility, to the officials of the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (CIID).

The ILO officials handed over a white Toyota sedan at its Gulshan-1 country office around 1:00pm, said Moinul Khan, director general of CIID.

The handover came four days after the CIID sought information from the World Bank about 16 vehicles its officials brought in the country under a duty-free facility.

The car was used by an official working as an international specialist in ILO, Bangladesh, from June 17 in 2008 to December 31, 2016, Moinul said.

While working in Bangladesh, he bought the car for personal use under the duty-free facility.

Customs Intelligence has recently become active against illegal use of duty-free vehicles by different international organisations. Being respectful of the law, the ILO handed over the car, CIID release said.

According to the law, the ILO official was supposed to return the pass book and the car to the National Board of Revenue (NBR) before he left Bangladesh.

Verdict

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lawyers completed placing arguments before Special Judge's Court of Noreesh Chandra Sarkar yesterday afternoon.

Two of three assailants arriving on a motorcycle shot Kunio Hoshi three times while he was going by a rickshaw to his grass farm at Alutari on the morning of October 3.

The 66-year-old had been living in the country for a year renting a house at Munshipara area in Rangpur city.

The arrestees are Masud Rana, 21, alias Mamun alias Montri and Ihsak Ali, 25, of Poshua Tangailpara village under Pargachha upazila; Liton Mia, 23, alias Rafiq of Gabtoli area under Bogra sadar upazila; Abu Sayeed, 28, of Kaliganj Bazar under Pargachha upazila and Shakhawat Hossain, 32, of Haldiachar in Gaibandha's Saghatta upazila.

Nazrul Islam alias Bike Nazrul of Panchagarh and Saddam Hossain of Kurigram were killed in Rajshahi and Dhaka on August 1, 2016 and January 5 this year respectively.

Ansar Ullah Ansari is yet to be arrested, said Public Prosecutor Rathish Chandra Bhowmik.

The case's investigation officer is Abdul Quader Zilani, Kaunia Police Station's officer-in-charge.

Ctg JCD leader

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According to police, four to five snatchers robbed one Nur Uddin of Tk 5 lakh in Katalgonj Boudhha Mandir area on February 15. Based on the clues from closed-circuit TV cameras, police arrested Arif and Mamun, and following their statements detained Shipu.

Tinu could not be contacted for comment as his mobile phone was switched off.

His follower and former vice president of Chittagong College unit of BCL Abu Mohammed Arif, who accompanied Tinu to the police station, said Tinu went to see Shipu as his brother, not as a Jubo League leader.

He said they accompanied Tinu but did not try to free Shipu. He also claimed that Shipu was falsely accused for his political involvement and he did not commit the crime.

BCL leader, three others arrested for land grab attempt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhalakathi

Rajapur upazila unit Chhatra League president and three others were arrested yesterday when they were "trying to drive out a family of their house to grab the land" in College Road area of Rajapur upazila town, said police.

The four are BCL leader Ahsan Habib Rubel, his mother and two of his followers.

Sheikh Monirul Gias, officer-in-charge of Rajapur Police Station, said the attackers injured seven people, including five women. They were admitted to Rajapur Upazila Health Complex. Three of them were in a critical condition.

Injured Sahera Begum, 45, owner of the house, alleged that some 50 to 60 youths, led by Rubel, attacked their house around 4:00am yesterday. They had firearms, iron rods, sticks and sharp weapons.

They hacked and beat up all the family members after vandalising the house and furniture, said Sahera, wife

of Faruk Shikder. Faruk stays and runs his business in Chittagong.

The attackers also looted valuable gold ornaments and mobile phones at gunpoint, said Kabita, 26, another victim of the attack. Kabita, a relative of Sahera, went to the house to visit Sahera.

Earlier, Rubel demanded Tk 10 lakh from their family if they wanted to live in the house, alleged Sahera, a mother of three.

They refused to give the money as they are the real owner of the land, she said.

Contacted, Rubel said neither he nor anyone of his family went to grab the house. Police arrested him and others from his house. "We have a land dispute with the family."

There are three cases against Rubel with Rajapur Police Station, said OC Gias.

Some policemen were deployed in the area to avert any further untoward incidents, he added.

A case was filed against the four with Rajapur Police Station.

Digital voting machines could be introduced if all parties agree

Says EC secretary

UNB, Dhaka

The Election Commission will introduce the digital voting machine (DVM) only after it gets positive responses from all quarters, Election Commission Secretary Muhammad Abdullah said yesterday.

"We must go for the system after satisfying all... if all want, the commission will cordially try to introduce the voting machines," he told reporters at his EC Secretariat office.

The EC secretary said there is nothing to be worried as the risk-free voting machine having the foolproof security system will prevent any manipulation.

He, however, did not make clear whether the machines will be used in the next parliamentary election fully, partially or not. "If we find a reliable machine and get positive responses from all, it may be possible to use it in the next general election."

It will not be an easy task to hold the entire parliamentary polls only based on the voting machine this time as some four lakh machines will be

needed for the same number of booths under 40,000 polling stations across the country, he added.

Abdullah said if the commission finally decides to introduce the voting machine, it needs to hold talks with all, including political parties, civil society and other stakeholders. Voters will also have to be educated about it.

The EC secretary said a committee formed with professors of computer science of different universities is likely to submit its report over the voting machines by this month. EC Additional Secretary Mokhlesur Rahman is the convener of the committee, while Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury is its adviser.

There must be data recovery system in case of damage, battery backup system for a long time. The machine will not work before and after the stipulated time. So, the machine will be safe and secure, he added.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has recently told parliament that a plan to introduce "e-voting" in the next national election can be considered to further ensure people's voting right.

PM trying

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he also reiterated that there would be no election in the country putting Khaleda behind bars.

Speaking at a reception in Germany on Friday, Hasina said Khaleda Zia would certainly be punished in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case if the court gets evidence and documents in this regard.

The PM also said, "This is clear that she [Khaleda] embezzled the orphanage money. If the court has the evidence, she must be punished... they [BNP] won't allow the election just to save a thief. What type of attitude is this?"

In yesterday's briefing, Rizvi criticised PM's comment, saying that

Hasina and her party's top leaders were continuously spreading lies over the "false and politically motivated" cases against the BNP chief.

He also alleged that the PM and the Awami League leaders' comments clearly manifested that they were hatching new plots against the BNP chief.

The BNP leader said there were 15 cases against Hasina when she became the prime minister, but she withdrew the cases "through magic" without legally facing those.

"The Awami League has set an example how their own cases can be removed, while others can be harassed by filing cases, using state power," Rizvi added.

India's only

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A team of scientists led by Abhay Mudholkar, from CSIR-National Institute of Oceanography (CSIR-NIO) in Goa reported that the volcano is active and spewing smoke and lava once again.

"On the afternoon of January 23, 2017, the scientific team on board CSIR-NIO's research ship R V Sindhu Sankalp were busy collecting sea floor samples in the Andaman Basin near the Barren volcano when it suddenly started spewing ash," the NIO has said.

"The team moved about one mile from the volcano and began closely observing it. It was erupting in small episodes lasting about five to ten minutes," said the release.

During the daytime only ash clouds were observed.

However, after sundown, the team observed red lava fountains spewing from the crater into the atmosphere and hot lava flows streaming down the slopes of the volcano, it said.

NIO has said the volcano was revisited in the early hours of January 26, 2017 again during the second leg of the cruise led by B Nagender Nath, it said, adding the team witnessed the continuation of spurts of blasts and smoke.

"They have sampled the sediments and water in the vicinity of the volcano and recovered coal-like black pyroclastic material representing proximal volcanic ejecta.

Clouds were seen at the crater mouth where the smoke was billowing out in otherwise clear sky," the researchers said.

An int'l figure

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University of Miami presented a paper titled "Sri Chinmoy's The Path of the Heart Meditations in Education". Two other papers -- "Spiritual Philosophy of Sri Chinmoy" and "God Realization in Sri Chinmoy's Spiritualism" -- were presented by PhD researcher Kamrun Nahar of Dhaka University and Prof Bakar respectively.

In the second session, Shantisri McGrath presented a paper on "The Philosophy of Sri Chinmoy", Prof Kamrul Ahsan of Jahangirnagar University on "Sri Chinmoy: A Spiritual Philosopher of Bangladesh", and Prof Shafiqul Alam of CU on "Sri Chinmoy and His Philosophy".

Highlighting the global impact of Chinmoy's philosophy of peace, the speakers told the seminar that professors of Bangladesh taught European, British, and Indian philosophy, but there was an international figure born in Chittagong, who was little known in Bangladesh.

The session was followed by a discussion where Prof Rashida Khanam and Masum Ahmed of CU spoke, among others.

In his inaugural speech, the VC said Chinmoy's philosophy inherited the oriental philosophy of Indian sub-continent. "His philosophy speaks of humanity and human equality."

The internationally famed philosopher was born in Boalkhali upazila in 1931.

He wrote 1,600 books, more than 10,000 songs, and thousands of verses, the seminar was told. His devotional songs are performed in Russia, Latvia, Indonesia, Guatemala, Zimbabwe and many other countries by his followers.

Sri Chinmoy Centre, which promotes the vision of a world where happiness is available to each and every individual, has now 250 branches across the world. The chapters promote meditation and innovative programmes like cycling, running for peace, swimming, and creative works.

Chinmoy introduced a meeting on meditation for peace at the UN headquarters in 1970.

He died in New York in 2007.

'Robber' killed in 'gunfight' with Rab

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

An alleged robber leader of Chapainawabganj was killed in a "gunfight" with the Rapid Action Battalion in Budhpara area in the city early yesterday.

Kawsar Hossain, 45, son of Yasin Ali of Chapainawabganj Sadar upazila, was the prime accused in four cases of two murders, an attempt to murder and a robbery incident, said Maj AM Ashrafur Islam of Rab-5.

"We confirmed his identity from a mobile phone found with him on the spot," said the official.

The "gunfight" occurred at 2:45am

when the robbers opened fire on a team of Rab-5 that reached the area on a regular patrol. The elite force members retaliated in defence, he added.

At one stage, the robbers retreated and Rab members recovered Kawsar with bullet wounds. He was declared dead when taken to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

Two Rab members received minor injuries during the 'gunfight' and took first aid at the hospital.

The Rab members seized a foreign pistol, a magazine loaded with four bullets, a knife and a large machet from the spot.

97pc hospitals in city

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fire exit plan, fire detection and alarm systems, hose reels, safe refuge assembly space, trained in-house firefighting team, fire escape route, fire lift, accessible road and water reservoir, he said.

A blaze at such hospitals and clinics will result in innumerable deaths and those taking treatment at intensive care units, coronary care unit and orthopaedic department would be the worst victims, said the director.

Almost all of them lack the vital escape ramp, he said, adding that the hospitals do not have designated fire-protected staircase for exit and evacuation.

As per Bangladesh National Building Code, fire exit route must be designed in such a way that it is unobstructed and protected against smoke and heat with fire-rated doors, fitted with mechanical ventilation, connected directly with the road outside the buildings for easy access and exit.

Besides, the hospitals and clinics are vulnerable to extreme fire hazards due to stockpiles of oxygen, chemicals and other highly flammable materials that help a fire turn into an inferno.

The residential buildings are in no way safe and suitable for running hospitals that have a large number of people round the clock, Shakil said.

As per the building code, one staircase has to be dedicated for fire escape for up to 50 occupants of a building, two for 100, three for 500 and four for 1,000 and more, he said, adding that it is a minimum requirement and is in addition to the one meant for day-to-day use.

Asked what steps they would take, the director said they had given the errant hospitals and clinics a month's deadline for installing fire safety equipment. Legal actions would be taken against those who would fail to install by the end of March.

"We will declare such establishments as risky for public use," he said. Those who would make efforts to install safety measures might be given some more time.

"However, we'll not allow hospitals and clinics at residential buildings as it is absolutely unsafe and illegal unless the entrepreneurs legally convert the buildings for the purpose," Shakil said.

Brigadier General Ali Ahmed Khan, director general of Fire Service and

Civil Defence, said after the deadline they would officially request the health directorate and the ministry to take legal actions against errant hospital and clinic authorities.

They would also request Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha to take legal actions against the illegal use of residential buildings for hospitals, and the two Dhaka city corporations to have their trade licences cancelled, he said.

According to the report, out of 20 hospitals in Gulshan, Baridhara and Badda, only two have satisfactory fire safety equipment. All 25 in Eskaton, Segunbagicha, Kakrail, Shahbagh, Wari and on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue are found risky.

Only five out of 38 in Mirpur, Kafrul, Pallabi, and on Rokeya Sarani have fire safety facilities. The rest are risky.

As many as 58 out of 66 in Mitford, on Johnson Road, Keraniganj, Shanir Akhra, Sayedabad, Jatrabari, Jurain, Kadamtoli, Dholairpar, Postogola, Matuail and Demra are found highly risky. Only one hospital there has fire safety equipment.

None of 19 in Tejgaon, Moghbazar and Mohakhali is found safe. In Uttara, all 27 hospitals are risky.

All six in Dhaka cantonment, Kurmitola and Khilkhet are found risky. Out of 87 in Savar and Ashulia, 84 are found unsafe.

All 74 in Kalabagan, Panthapath, Dhanmondi, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Shyamoli and Mohammadpur are found risky. Similarly, all 35 in Demra, Khilgaon, Rampura, Shahjahanpur, Mugda and Malibagh are risky.

All 36 in Kamrangirchar, Hazaribagh, Lalbagh, Azimpur and Hatirpur are found risky.

Against the global standard of one firefighter for 2,000 people, Dhaka city has one for four lakh people, fire officials said.

Major Shakil said they need more firefighters, modern training, logistics and direct appointment of high officials to better tackle fire incidents.

There are some 7,000 firefighters in the country, he said, adding that firefighters often remain morally down with just two promotions in 35 years. Those having equal status in the armed forces, police and BGB get six promotions, he noted.

Iraq opens assault

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Mosul "fully liberated" on January 24.

But it took Iraq's most seasoned forces -- the elite Counter-Terrorism Service -- more than two months to clear the eastern side of Mosul.

TRAPPED CIVILIANS

Aid organisations had feared an exodus of unprecedented proportions before the start of the Mosul operation but half a million -- a significant majority -- of residents stayed home.

Their continued presence prevented both sides from resorting to deadlier weaponry, which may have slowed down the battle but averted a potentially much more serious humanitarian emergency in the middle of winter as well as more extensive material damage to the city.

"We are racing against the clock to prepare emergency sites south of Mosul to receive displaced families," the UN's humanitarian coordinator in Iraq, Lise Grande, said in a statement.

Residents of west Mosul have reported very difficult living conditions and warned that they were already low on food, with weeks of fighting expected to lie ahead.

Save the Children urged all parties to protect the estimated 350,000 children currently trapped in west Mosul.

"This is the grim choice for children in western Mosul right now: bombs, crossfire and hunger if they stay -- or execution and snipers if they try to run," said the charity's Iraq director, Maurizio Crivallero.

IS fighters and Mosul residents remained able to move across both

sides of the city during much of the fighting in the east but all bridges across the Tigris have now been dropped and the jihadists in the west are all but besieged.

IS has used civilians as human shields as part of its defence tactics and killed residents attempting to flee, making it both difficult and dangerous for the population to escape.

Broadcast

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media platforms, he said.

The minister also talked about several other issues, including the ninth wage board for journalists, Sagar-Runi murder and BNP's poll-time government formula.

He termed the BNP formula a "conspiracy to foil elections" and "an attempt to create grounds for an abnormal government".

BNP and its chief Khaleda Zia were looking for scopes to "bargain with the government in a bid to escape trial", he said.

On the journalist couple murder, he said the non-completion of the legal procedures in the case was a failure of the government and that it was working to come out of that failure.

Inu also said the government has completed the groundwork for the formation of the ninth wage board for the journalists of newspapers and electronic media.

He said they sought the name of a Supreme Court justice after completing the groundwork for the wage board formation. The electronic media would be included in the wage board this time, he added.